

SUICIDE; VALUE CHANGES AND CURRENT TRENDS*

Jerald Savells
Wright State University

Bonnie Bowen
Wright State University

In most cultures, suicide carries with it the notion of tragedy. Regardless of the kind or degree of causation involved, suicidal acts usually reflect a state of personal and/or social disorganization within a specific ongoing social system. To a large extent the behavior of the members of a given society will be patterned in accordance with specific value orientations, often reflecting a strong state of ethnocentrism and temprocentrism. Hence, it is apparent that both the rise of suicide and our acceptance of it within a specific social environment are coming about as a consequence of technological change, and offer one more example of how technology has not only transformed our culture, but also ourselves. Although the sheer "morality" of the suicidal act has varied from one society to another and from one historical era to another, the normative evaluation of this particular type of deviance is neither uniform nor categorical.

"One cannot look directly at either the sun or death."

--de la Rochefoucauld

In contemporary America, where life is increasingly indulgent and comfortable, the sheer attempt to commit suicide may evoke a sense of amazement, if not social outrage (Weinberg, 1974:65).¹ Suicide suggests the antithesis of the application of rational thought in such a social environment. According to Kramer, *et. al.*, (1972:173), the suicide problem is further complicated by the fact that, unlike death from natural causes (e.g., organic disease) for which the intermediate processes and primary causation leading to death are more or less traceable, death by suicide is a psychological act which can be analyzed only with great difficulty. Hence, society generally recoils at the notion of suicide and insists that self-preservation has become, if not a mandate, at least an obligation to one's family.

*A paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Southern Sociological Society, Washington, D.C., April 11, 1975. This paper should not be reprinted in any form without the permission of the authors.

Life seems too pleasant to snuff out by one's own hand...
The overwhelming majority of people prize and defend
their lives so intensely that self-preservation is
considered ... an instinct (Weinberg, 1974:65).

As with all other forms of deviant behavior, it is only through an analysis of the socialization processes and the cultural heritage of a given society that one can begin to comprehend the "social" meanings of the suicidal act (Akers, 1973:249).² Regardless of the kind or degree of causation involved, suicidal acts reflect a state of personal and/or social disorganization within a specific ongoing social system.

It has been emphasized by Gibbs (1971) that suicide is not only an individual problem, but also a social problem.³ Hence, since there has been considerable research on the subject of suicide in recent years, any attempt to deal "comprehensively" with this topic within the scope of a single research paper would be both problematic and unrealistic.

The intent of this research will be to present a brief description of the American social climate in the mid-1970's and show how one might interpret the presence of suicide through the investigation of an existing body of professional literature in sociology.⁴

While suicide (is) ... increasing, condemnation of suicide is clearly declining. Like divorce and abortion, suicide now is viewed as a tragic human choice, and perhaps soon it may be seen as a rational, if somewhat unfortunate, human choice (italics added; Binstock, 1974:68)

Suicide: Rationale and Reaction

Suicide, for the most part, is still a taboo subject for polite dinner conversation. Most people intentionally avoid public discussion of it and justify their actions in whatever manner seems possible. The emphasis in America today is sharply focused on the theme of youth and living life fully; hence, suicide represents a threat to our assumed cultural priorities.

In a literal sense, suicide is not merely asocial behavior that society has "labeled" as either offensive and/or destructive, but also suggests a direct (and often rebellious) violation of the normative expectations of certain traditional social institutions, e.g., the church and the family. Yet, it is significant to note that the specific values held by the actor-victim were developed within a framework of social definitions, morality, and rationalizations (Weinberg, 1974:19). Regardless of cause-and-effect, deviant behavior (e.g., suicide) excites great emotion and controversy, and stimulates the application of social control mechanisms wherever possible (Bertrand, 1973:369).

Suicidal actions are meaningful in the sense that something is fundamentally wrong with the situations of the actor. The real meaning of a suicide is not necessarily that reached by friends, family, or the coroner. Outsiders may regard the suicide as "senseless" and "irrational," because he was "distraught," "lost," or "depressed." In actuality, studies of suicide notes and diaries, as well as interviews with those

who have attempted suicide, indicate suicidal actions through death, and the dying process is a means of transforming the essential "substantial" self of the actor in many ways (Clinard, 1974:646).

From a "structural" viewpoint, sociologists have traditionally acknowledged (from Durkheim to the present) that loosely organized societies which lack social cohesion have higher rates of individualized suicide than cohesive societies (with a strong state of the "collective conscience," and the social control maintained by one's primary group and the community).⁵

Now that urbanism and industrialism are a fait accompli in the American experience, one might wonder "why" suicide has become a serious social problem in such an affluent and opulent society.⁶ It is true that there has been a magnificent growth of human organizations to provide for "certain" needs of the average American, e.g., modern corporate bureaucracies that insure the continued production and availability of mass goods and services, an incomparable range of schools from kindergarten through higher education, a proliferation of an endless number of churches of all denominations, a wide selection of hospitals, and programs to care for the elderly and less capable members of our population. Each of these represent efforts to create an institutionalized humanity for mainstream America (Savells, et. al., 1975:10; Schneider, 1968:5-8). However, in spite of this so-called "progress" in societal growth, select portions of the American population still find themselves apathetic and estranged.⁷

The mythical "John Doe" in 1975 discovers that his behavior is increasingly divided (fragmented?) and isolated into segments: commuting, work, family, and television. To a considerable extent, his personal relations with others in this social environment has become more particularized, functional, and pecuniary (Schneider, 1968:5-8).⁸

Technology, Value Changes, and Suicidal Behavior

Beginning with the research of Durkheim up to the present, it appears that suicide is a relatively "normal" condition of social life (increasingly evident in a complex urbanized industrial society); hence, it is one alternative among many offered by the natural processes of our social order. This does not suggest that the general public considers it as a realistic solution to individual or social problems, but even without considering it acceptable, our mass society has shown distinct signs of toleration and/or indifference toward those who wish to exercise this option (Binstock, 1974:68).

To a large extent the behavior of the members of a given society will be patterned in accordance with specific value orientations (probably reflecting both considerable ethnocentrism and temprocentrism).⁹ Today, according to Binstock (1974:69), life is more fantasied and abstract, with human beings wrestling the means of survival -- both economic and emotional -- not from nature, but from a man-created industrial jungle.¹⁰

Within specific social groups, there is generally an inverse relationship between the degree of social cohesion and the proclivity of the individual to seriously consider suicide. In view of this, Henry and Short (1954) found that urban communities have higher suicide rates than rural communities,

Protestant denominations more than Catholics, residents of hotel or rooming houses more than those in single-home family residential areas, divorced more than married or widowed, and persons older than age 65 more than married men younger than age 65 (Henry and Short, 1954; Weinberg, 1974:68). Hence, a recognition of the validity of specific norms and the presence of social control is essential in a mass society experiencing considerable social disorganization if the "individual" is to ascertain a sense of meaningfulness and continuity in his life.

In loosely cohesive societies the members can deviate and become estranged from the control of societal norms, and one way they do so is by disposing of themselves through suicide (Weinberg, 1974:69).¹¹

When select individuals find that they are unable to achieve goals specified as desirable and status-conferring by the society-at-large, rebellion and various kinds of escapist (e.g., suicide) acts are likely to be the inevitable result of personal and social frustration (Savells, et. al., 1975:6).

In any social system, some norms are likely to create more stress in the persons to whom they apply than others do. Particularly those norms that emphasize competition and achievement are stressful (Leslie, et. al., 1973:221).

Leslie, et. al., (1973) has maintained that the larger and more complex a society becomes, the less smoothly does adjustment in one stage of life flow from adjustment to the stage that preceded it. Hence, unlike the situation in "folk" societies where childhood experiences provided direct preparation for coping with the forthcoming demands of adolescence, and subsequently with the demands for adult living -- modern societies are more likely to reveal a lack of continuity, and even social conflict, as they are being transformed from a pre-industrial to a post-industrial state (Savells, et. al., 1975:7).

Modern societies are characterized by very rapid rates of social change and the process of norm breakdown is much more obvious. Norm breakdown leaves people without clear guides to appropriate behavior and increases the amount of (suicide) ... (Leslie, et. al., 1973:218).

Technological progress in America since the turn of this century has been characterized as "revolutionary."¹² However, a rapidly developing technology also has a tendency to alter man's behavior and cause a shift in values (Savells, et. al., 1975:8).¹³ Thus, while modern industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization have helped to solve some problems for modern man, they have also created new ones (Eitzen, 1974:225-226).

Wright (1974:5) notes that when the structure of a society begins to change in the direction of a greater division-of-labor, values, likewise, will also undergo a transformation. "There is, then, some agreement that increasing complexity of societies has values as both independent and dependent variables" (Wright, 1974:6).

On an "individual" level, one consequence of creating a mass society (with value changes apparent) is increasing the amount of social isolation experienced by its members. As the social solidarity present in a given society is changed by time and the complex forces of modernization -- resulting in an apparent differentiation of goals and the means-to-ends schema for goal attainment -- it appears that man will increasingly find himself with less secure social roots.¹⁴

Suicide Trends and the Challenge to Survival in a Mass Society

The growth of an urban industrial society in America has created a transformation in the field of human organization. What once was motivated by sheer tradition is now initiated and organized in corporate institutions and national agencies (the social structure of modern bureaucracies). This has created an increasing atomization of the individual in society and revealed his vulnerability to specific social forces largely beyond his ability to control (Savells, et. al., 1975:9).

...we are coming to see suicide as less condemnable than it once was, increasingly understandable, and preferable to aggression. The price we are paying for greater interdependence and choice is ... a growing burden of psychic pain (Binstock, 1974:70).

Within this social milieu, the individual's status and identity, what and who he is, becomes less visible, less concrete, and less secure. Hence, in an effort to overcome this dilemma, purchaseable commodities have become status symbols in our mass culture and, as such, part of what Goffman has called the individual's "identity kit" (Berger, 1971:269; Goddman, 1959).¹⁵

Today, it appears that new efforts and insights are required to probe the ancient puzzle of man's tendencies toward self-destruction.¹⁶ Self-inflicted deaths in America in 1973 -- those officially recorded as suicides -- claimed the lives of an estimated 24,440 persons.¹⁷ In analyzing the incident rate of suicide in America for the period from 1950 to 1970, one can observe a considerable similarity in the rate per 100,000 of our population -- suggesting that an increase in the absolute number of suicides reflects a proportionate increase (per 100,000) in the growth of this country (see Table I).

Suicide rates in America have shown considerable variation by "age groupings." The acceptability of suicide as one solution to life's problems is more apparent for the 35 and over ages (see Table II).

Research has shown that most suicides occur in urban areas (with the highest incident rate in the major cities along the East and West coasts), with men committing suicide more frequently and violently than women.¹⁸ According to Bock (1973:71), suicide has now become the twelfth leading cause of death in America during the past decade. The present rate of 11.7 per 100,000 in the United States means that 67 individuals commit suicide daily.

In essence, our suicide rates parallel the level of our participation in the American technocracy (Binstock, 1974:71). Hence, Binstock has shown that the suicide rate is the lowest among those individuals who are marginal to our technological society -- the least educated, least professionally skilled,

and the least organizationally involved. On the other hand, the highest rates of suicides are among members of the upper-middle professional and managerial classes -- "the rate is highest of all among artists, intellectuals, and scientists -- those whose values and skills are closest to the impending future" (Binstock, 1974:71).

It is apparent that both the rise of suicide and our moral acceptance of it are coming about as a consequence of technological change, and offer one more example of how technology has not only transformed our culture, but also ourselves.¹⁹

By examining the demands of the culture that we are creating and by understanding better the nature of the human species, we may be able to adapt our ... values and our social system to changing realities without having to fear chaos... (Binstock, 1974:71).

Summary and Conclusions

Research on the subject of suicide has not been confined to sociology alone; rather, on the contrary, anthropologists, philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians, and others have all studied suicide. According to Gibbs (1968:1), few, if any, other kind(s) of human behavior has received so much attention by such a variety of scholars, and the amount of attention devoted to suicide is almost as puzzling as the act itself.

The most frequent causes of suicide tend to be acute depression, serious physical illnesses (sometimes terminal), acute financial reversals, chronic states of frustration combined with an extreme degree of stress, and excessive use of drugs -- e.g., barbituates and/or alcohol. Thus, suicide is usually the result (anticipated solution on the part of the actor-victim) of a unique combination of both personal and social factors that appear overwhelming.

There remains today considerable ambiguity of the normative evaluation of the suicidal act.²⁰ However, in retrospect, one can observe that the sheer "morality" of the suicidal act has varied from one society to another and from one historical era to another. According to Gibbs (1968:3), the normative evaluation of this particular type of deviance is neither uniform nor categorical.

In contrast to our agrarian past, the fact that more people are confronting the question of whether suicide is "right" or "wrong," suggest that the norm is being altered with the passage of time and the modernization of our society. Increasingly, the individual who would seriously contemplate suicide in the mid-1970's will find himself/herself forced to rely on the dictates of their own conscience.²¹ However, suicide obviously eliminates the very "consciousness" which has posited the question and anticipated the ultimate answer (Porterfield, 1968:49).

Footnotes

1. Clinard (1974:626) has suggested that suicide can be interpreted as either the destruction of one's self, self-killing, or, in a legalistic sense, self-murder. Furthermore, Durkheim (1951:44) suggested that suicide would include "all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself...".

2. "So strongly is suicide condemned by Western European peoples that one might assume this attitude to be universal. Both today and in the past, however, attitudes toward self-destruction have varied widely. Mohammedan countries strongly condemn suicide, the Koran expressly condemns it, and in actuality it rarely occurs there. The people of the Orient, however, did not normally disapprove of suicide. In fact, suttee, or the suicide of a widow on her husband's death, was common in India until well into the last century... Other aspects of Hindu philosophy encouraged suicide for religious reasons and particularly the tendency to disregard the physical body... Voluntary death has been given an honorable place in Buddhist countries... (and) for many centuries suicide was favorably regarded in Japan... (however), the attitude of contemporary Western European peoples toward suicide originated mainly in the philosophies of the Jewish and later the Christian religions. The Talmudic law of the Jewish religion takes a strong position against suicide... (and) basic to the Christian condemnation of suicide were the concepts that human life is sacred, that the individual is subordinate to God, and that death should be considered an entrance to a new life in which one's behavior in the old is important" (Clinard, 1974:627-628).

3. In most cultures, suicide carries with it the notion of tragedy. However, unlike any other form of death, it is usually considered avoidable, and this avoidability stamps it as a social problem (Gibbs, 1971:271-272).

4. It is suggested that before the sociologist can undertake a meaningful and fruitful discussion of "attitudes" toward suicide (and death), he must acquire at least a rudimentary comprehension of the manner in which specific social attitudes reflect changing values in our modern urban society. See Richard C. Dumont and Dennis C. Foss, The American View of Death, (Boston: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1971), Chapter one. Furthermore, it should also be mentioned at the outset that certain limitations exist in analyzing suicide because the nature and fortunes (or misfortunes) of the individual's development within a particular cultural context cannot be completely discerned (or interpreted) without the opportunity to evaluate the subjective understanding of the motive(s) for committing the act as perceived by the victim. Since the completed suicide is (by its very nature) not a recurrent type of behavior, the parameters of the social scientist's research efforts are clearly delimited. For additional information on suicide, see Emile Durkheim, Suicide, Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, (New York: The Free Press, 1951); Donald L. Akers, "On the Prevalence of Persons Who Have Attempted Suicide in Los Angeles," Bulletin of Suicidology, Volume 8, Fall 1971; Lynette Beale, "The Dynamics of Suicide: A Review of the Literature 1897-1965," Bulletin of Suicidology, Volume 5, March 1968; Warren Breed, "Occupational Mobility and Suicide Among White Males," American Sociological Review, Volume 28, April 1963; Warren Breed, "Suicide and Loss in Social Interaction," in Essays in Self-Destruction, edited by Edwin S. Schneidman, (New York: Science House, 1967); William J. Chambliss and Marion F. Steele, "Status Integration and Suicide: An Assessment," American Sociological Review, Volume 31, August 1966; Jack

Douglas, The Social Meanings of Suicide (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Louis Dublin, Suicide: A Sociological and Statistical Study (New York: Ronald Press, 1963); Jack Gibbs, (editor), Suicide, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Jack Gibbs and Walter Martin, Status Integration and Suicide, (Eugene: The University of Oregon Press, 1964); Jack Gibbs and Walter Martin, "On Assessing the Theory of Status Integration and Suicide," American Sociological Review, Volume 31, August 1966; Martin Gold, "Suicide, Homicide and the Socialization of Aggression," in Deviant Behavior and Social Process, edited by William A. Rushing, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969); Robert Hagedorn and Sanford Labovitz, "Note on Status Integration and Suicide," Social Problems, Volume 14, Summer 1966; Jerry Jacobs, "Phenomenological Study of Suicide Notes," Social Problems, Volume 15, Summer 1967; Barclay Johnson, "Durkheim's One Cause of Suicide," American Sociological Review, Volume 30, December 1965; Ronald Maris, Social Forces in Urban Suicide, (Homewood: Dorsey Press, 1969); Karl Menninger, Man Against Himself, (New York: Harcourt, Brace Janovich, 1938); Austin Porterfield, "The Problem of Suicide," Suicide, edited by Jack P. Gibbs, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Edwin H. Powell, "Occupation, Status, and Suicide: Toward a Redefinition of Anomie," American Sociological Review, Volume 23, April, 1958; Richard Quinney, "Suicide, Homicide, and Economic Development," Social Forces, Volume 43, March 1965; Edwin S. Schneidman and Norman L. Farberow (editors), Clues to Suicide, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957); J. E. Teele, "Suicidal Behavior, Assaultiveness, and Socialization Principles," Social Forces, Volume 43, May 1965; and, James Wilkins, "Suicidal Behavior," American Sociological Review, Volume 32, April 1967.

5. There have been numerous efforts to formulate an overall theoretical explanation of suicide. Durkheim maintained that the suicide rate in any population cannot be adequately explained by the attributes of the actor-victim in the population but rather by analyzing the varying degrees of social cohesion or social integration; hence, he felt that suicide was related inversely to the stability and integration of social relations, whether religious, family, or others (Clinard, 1974:649-650). Kramer, et. al., (1972:174), has suggested that Durkheim exhibited neither interest in nor orientation toward the psychological aspects of suicide. Freud, on the other hand, displayed a parallel disregard for the social aspects of the act by emphasizing that self-hatred seen in depression originated in anger toward a love object which the individual then turned back upon himself -- making suicide a kind of inverted murder. "A sociological approach provides no way of evaluating the relative impact of different social pressures and tends to be blind or at best weak in seeing how social forces are integrated by the individual personality. On the other hand, psychiatric thinking that starts with the individual and never leaves the individual can be equally blind in understanding the specific psychosocial attitudes within the culture and the role they play in shaping the individual personality" (Kramer, et. al., 1972:175).

6. For example, Binstock (1974:68) has observed in her research that suicide among young people is soaring. For young Americans between the ages of 15 to 24, the rate has jumped 264 percent from 1950 to 1972 (the rate has risen from 4.7 per 100,000 in 1950 to 12.4 per 100,000 in 1972). Furthermore, Binstock has noted that the rate for young adults between the ages of 25 to 34 has risen only a little less sharply from 9.4 in 1950 to 14.3 per 100,000 in 1972, an increase of 152 percent. For additional information, see Jeanne Binstock, "Choosing to Die: The Decline of Aggression and the Rise of Suicide," The Futurist, April 1974, pp. 68-71.

7. Leslie, et. al., (1973:218) has suggested that modern societies are characterized by very rapid rates of social change and the process of norm breakdown is much more obvious. In essence, norm breakdown leaves the individual without clear-cut guidelines to specify appropriate behavior and ultimately increases the amount and severity of deviance. See Gerald Leslie, Richard Larson, and Benjamin Gorman, Order and Change, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

8. "Our modern technological environment demands more self-conscious, willing cooperation and mutuality than any previous culture in history. We are becoming too dependent on each other to allow the open expression of anger in either organization or private life. The spread of organizational involvement and voluntary relationships, while extending human choice and increasing economic productivity, is crippling the expression of human aggression. The capacity to maintain satisfactory, productive relationships in the organizational world and in private relationships is more and more contingent upon the individual's skillfulness in handling his own ambivalent aggressive and dependent needs. People can attack each other freely only when relationships cannot be broken. Interdependence and free choice, the twin contradictory products of an advanced technological society, demand that the primitive feelings of hate and anger that are so natural to human beings be either suppressed or greatly modulated, channeled and sublimated.... Suicide is increasingly seen to be the only way out -- the only alternative to abandoning one's self to potentially uncontrollable anger or to endless depression" (Binstock, 1974:69-70).

9. For additional information, see J. D. Cardwell, Social Psychology, (Philadelphia F.A. Davis, 1971); John P. Spiegel, "The Resolution of Role Conflict within the Family," in Warren Bennis, et. al., (editors), The Planning of Change, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); and, Burton Wright II, "Value Change, Emergent Values, and the Future," a Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, April 18, 1974.

10. According to Binstock (1974:69), now that we live in a short-term, contractual society, man finds that he must discipline his natural aggression to a degree far greater than was ever necessary for social survival in the earlier annals of human history.

11. For additional information, see Andrew F. Henry and James F. Short, Jr., Suicide and Homicide, (New York: The Free Press, 1954).

12. This can be seen in the mass production of goods and services, a modern urban environment, instantaneous communications, advanced transportation, an "elite" military force, and economic affluence for many.

13. For an excellent discussion of this phenomena, see Geoffrey Vickers, Value Systems and Social Process, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970. Also, see Kurt Baier and Nicholas Rescher, editors, Values and the Future, (New York: The Free Press, 1969); Judith Blake and Kinsley Davis, "Norms, Values, and Sanctions," in Robert E. L. Faris, editor, Handbook of Modern Sociology, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964); Clyde Kluckhohn, "Values and Value Orientations," in Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, editors, Toward A General Theory of Action, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Robin M. Williams, Jr., American Society, Second Edition, (New York: Knopf, 1960); and, Burton Wright II, "Value Change, Emergent Values, and the Future," a paper presented at the annual meetings of the Southern Sociological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1974.

14. This does not suggest a chronic (or totally unexpected) state of societal and/or personal disorganization, but rather one of the predictable problems recurrent in any society experiencing "future shock" through an accelerating social, economic, and political development. Nevertheless, when the tempo of social change (and/or value changes) approach the N-point of modern man's ability to cope with it, the behavior of the individual is likely to become confused and irrational. This may be expressed through a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, anomie, etc., with the subsequent acceptance of extreme measures to avoid this chaotic situation, e.g., suicide becoming one alternative.

15. For additional information, see Brigitte Berger, Societies in Change, (New York: Basic Books, 1971, Chapter 9), also, Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

16. This is not to suggest that the ideas expressed in this paper, whatever their merits, will alleviate this age-old issue. Hopefully, they will serve to stimulate constructive debate as a step in the right direction.

17. "Statisticians ... point out that many suicide deaths are attributed to other causes because of religious or social stigma, or because life-insurance companies often refuse payment to beneficiaries where suicide is certified." See "Upsurge in Suicides -- and in Ways to Prevent Them," U. S. News and World Reports, July 1, 1974, pp. 47-48. Also, see Statistical Abstracts of the United States 1973, (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census).

18. According to the data reported in the Statistical Abstracts of the United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, for 1973, it appears that suicide among older women may be declining gradually; whereas, older men tend to have one of the highest incident rates of all age groups. Among black females, however, there has been an increase of over 75 percent in the suicide rate in the last two decades. In contrasting this with other minority groups, it is interesting to note that the suicide rate for the American Indian population is over five times higher than the national average. This would suggest that there are some very notable exceptions to Binstock's research findings. See Jeanne Binstock, "Choosing to Die: The Decline of Aggression and the Rise of Suicide," The Futurist, April 1974, pp. 68-71; also, see E. Wilbur Bock and Irving Webber, "Suicide Among the Elderly: Isolating Widowhood and Mitigating Alternatives," Journal of Marriage and the Family, February 1972, pp. 24-31; and, E. Wilbur Bock, "Aging and Suicide: The Significance of Marital, Kinship, and Alternative Relations," The Family Coordinator, January 1973.

19. See Binstock, op. cit., pp. 68-71.

20. Gibbs (1968:1) has noted with some concern that the goals of most investigators conducting research on suicide has been to explain, rather than to prevent, the act. This may suffice as one illustration of how modern bureaucracies, e.g., including many universities, have also promoted the acceptance of certain values concerning the research of their faculty. To some degree, the authors of this paper have not totally avoided this dilemma. For additional information on this problem, see Jerald Savells, "The Americanization of the Bureaucratic Ethos," Personnel Journal, Volume 51, November 1972, pp. 835-839.

21. It is evident that an opportunity to commit suicide is virtually always present -- thus, the usual social control measures available to regulate and/or suppress the occurrence of deviance are not particularly effective in restraining individuals from self-murder. See Jack P. Gibbs, (editor), Suicide, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 3-4.

References

Akers, Donald L.

1971 "On the Prevalence of Persons Who Have Attempted Suicide in Los Angeles." Bulletin of Suicidology, Volume 8, Fall.

Baier, Kurt and Nicholas Rescher, editors

1969 Values and the Future. New York: The Free Press.

Beale, Lynette

1968 "The Dynamics of Suicide: A Review of the Literature 1897-1965," Bulletin of Suicidology, Volume 5, March.

Berger, Brigitte

1971 Societies in Change. New York: Basic Books.

Bertrand, Alvin

1972 Social Organization. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.

1973 Sociology. Second Edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Binstock, Jeanne

1974 "Choosing to Die: The Decline of Aggression and the Rise of Suicide," The Futurist, April:68-71.

Blake, Judith and Kingsley Davis

1964 "Norms, Values, and Sanctions." Handbook of Modern Sociology, Edited by Robert E. L. Faris. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Bock, Wilbur E.

1973 "Aging and Suicide: The Significance of Marital, Kinship, and Alternative Relations." The Family Coordinator, January:70-79.

Bock, Wilbur E. and Irving Webber

1972 "Suicide Among the Elderly: Isolating Widowhood and Mitigating Alternatives." Journal of Marriage and the Family, February:24-31.

Breed, Warren

1963 "Occupational Mobility and Suicide Among White Males." American Sociological Review, Volume 28, April.

1967 "Suicide and Loss in Social Interaction." Essays in Self-Destruction. Edited by Edwin S. Schneidman. New York: Science House.

Burrows, David and Frederick R. Lapides, editors.

1969 Alienation. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.

Cardwell, J. D.

1971 Social Psychology. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.

Chambliss, William J., and Marion F. Steele

1966 "Status Integration and Suicide: An Assessment." American Sociological Review, Volume 31, August.

Clinard, Marshall B.

1974 Sociology of Deviant Behavior. Fourth edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Douglas, Jack

1967 The Social Meaning of Suicide. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dublin, Louis

1963 Suicide: A Sociological and Statistical Study. New York: Ronald Press.

Dumont, Richard G., and Dennis C. Foss

1971 The American View of Death. Boston: Schenkman Publishing Company.

Durkheim, Emile

1951 Suicide. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: The Free Press.

Eitzen, D. Stanley

1974 Social Structure and Social Problems in America. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Goffman, Erving

1959 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Gold, Martin

1969 "Suicide, Homicide, and the Socialization of Aggression." Deviant Behavior and Social Process. Edited by William A. Rushing, Chicago: Rand McNally.

Gibbs, Jack and Walter Martin

1966 "On Assessing the Theory of Status Integration and Suicide." American Sociological Review, Volume 31, August.

1964 Status Integration and Suicide. Eugene: The University of Oregon Press.

Gibbs, Jack P. editor.

1968 Suicide. New York: Harper and Row.

Hagedorn, Robert and Sanford Labovitz

1966 "Note on Status Integration and Suicide." Social Problems, Volume 14, Summer.

Henry, Andrew F., and James F. Short, Jr.

1954 Suicide and Homicide. New York: The Free Press.

Jacobs, Jerry

1967 "Phenomenological Study of Suicide Notes." Social Problems, volume 15, Summer.

Johnson, Barclay

- 1965 "Durkheim's One Cause of Suicide." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 30, December.

Kluckhohn, Clyde

- 1954 "Values and Value Orientations." *Toward a General Theory of Action*. Edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kramer, Morton, Earl Pollack, Richard Redick, and Ben Locke

- 1972 *Mental Disorders and Suicide*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Leslie, Gerald, Richard Larson, and Benjamin Gorman

- 1973 *Order and Change*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lowry, Ritchie P., and Robert P. Rankin

- 1972 *Sociology*. Second edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Maris, Ronald

- 1969 *Social Forces in Urban Suicide*. Homewood: The Dorsey Press.

Menninger, Karl

- 1938 *Man Against Himself*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich.

Merton, Robert K., and Robert Nisbet

- 1971 *Contemporary Social Problems*. Third Edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich.

Porterfield, Austin

- 1968 "The Problem of Suicide." *Suicide*. Edited by Jack P. Gibbs, New York: Harper and Row.

Powell, Elwin H.

- 1958 "Occupation, Status, and Suicide: Toward a Redefinition of Anomie." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 23, April.

Quinney, Richard

- 1965 "Suicide, Homicide, and Economic Development." *Social Forces*, Volume 43, March.

Savells, Jerald

- 1972 "The Americanization of the Bureaucratic Ethos." *Personnel Journal*, Volume 51, November:835-839.

Savells, Jerald, and Richard Metzger

- 1975 "Juvenile Delinquency in Israel." A Paper presented at the Annual Alpha Kappa Delta Research Symposium, Richmond, Virginia, February 20-22.

Schneider, Kenneth R.

- 1968 *Destiny of Change*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Schneidman, Edwin S., and Norman L. Farberow, editors.

- 1957 *Clues to Suicide*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Speigel, John P.

- 1961 "The Resolution of Role Conflict within the Family." *The Planning of Change*. Edited by Warren Bennis, et. al., New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Teele, J. E.

- 1965 "Suicidal Behavior, Assaultiveness, and Socialization Principles." *Social Forces*, Volume 43, May.

Vickers, Geoffrey

- 1970 *Value Systems and Social Process*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Weinberg, S. Kirson

- 1974 *Deviant Behavior and Social Control*. Dubuque: William C. Brown Publishers.

Wilkins, James

- 1967 "Suicidal Behavior." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 32, April.

Williams, Robin M., Jr.

- 1960 *American Society*. Second Edition. New York: Knopf.

Wright, Burton II, John P. Weiss, and Charles M. Unkovic

- 1975 *Perspective: An Introduction to Sociology*. Hinsdale: The Dryden Press.

Wright, Burton II

- 1974 "Value Change, Emergent Values, and the Future." A Paper presented at the Annual Southern Sociological Society Meetings, Atlanta, Georgia, April 18.

Other Sources

Statistical Abstracts of the United States

- 1972 Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Statistical Abstracts of the United States

- 1973 Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Statistical Abstracts of the United States

- 1974 Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

"Upsurge in Suicides -- and in Ways to Prevent Them." *U.S. News and World Reports*, July 1, 1974, pp. 47-48.

Table I

Number and Rate of Suicides Per 100,000
Population, United States, 1950-1970**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Rate per 100,000</u>
1950	17,145	11.4
1960	19,450	10.8
1965	21,507	11.1
1966	21,281	10.9
1967	21,325	10.8
1968	21,372	10.7
1969	22,364	11.1
1970	22,630	11.0

**Source: Marshall B. Clinard, Sociology of Deviant Behavior, Fourth Edition, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974.) The statistical department of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company estimates that the number of attempted suicides is probably in the range of six to seven for each case of reported suicide (Clinard, 1974:627).

Table II

Suicide Rates in the United States Per 100,000
Population, By Age, 1970**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Rate per 100,000</u>
1-14	118	0.2
15-24	2,357	6.7
25-34	2,855	11.4
35-44	3,809	16.5
45-54	4,477	19.2
55-64	3,897	20.9
65-74	2,311	18.6
75 & over	1,548	20.3

**Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1972, (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Table 80, p. 59).

TABLE III

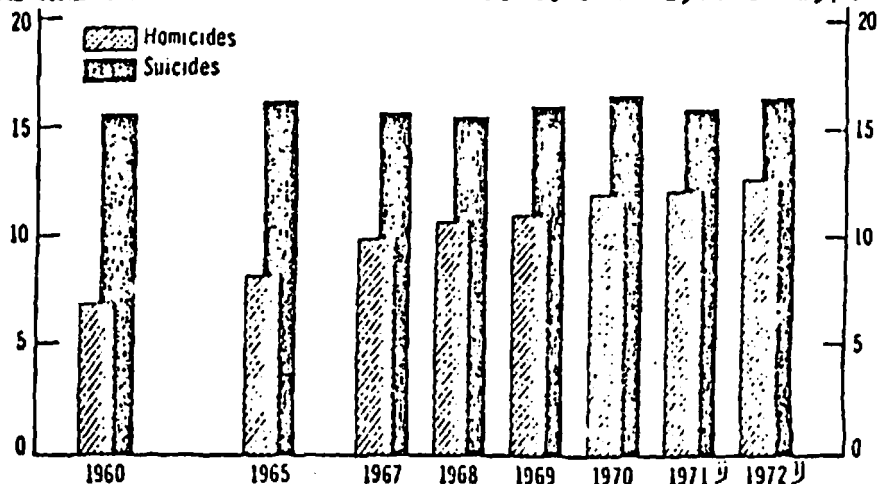
SUICIDE MORTALITY RATES BY SEX, RACE, AND AGE GROUPS:
1950-1970**
(Rate per 100,000 Population)

AGE	MALE						FEMALE					
	White			Negro & Other			White			Negro & Other		
	1950	1960	1970	1950	1960	1970	1950	1960	1970	1950	1960	1970
5-14	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.2
15-24	6.6	8.6	13.9	5.3	5.3	11.3	2.7	2.3	4.2	1.7	1.5	4.1
25-34	13.8	14.9	19.9	10.1	12.9	19.8	5.2	5.8	9.0	2.8	3.5	5.8
35-44	22.4	21.9	23.3	11.3	13.5	12.6	8.2	8.1	13.0	2.2	3.7	4.3
45-54	34.1	33.7	29.5	11.7	12.8	14.1	10.5	10.9	13.5	4.0	3.2	4.5
55-64	45.9	40.2	35.0	16.8	16.9	10.5	10.7	10.9	12.3	1.2	3.4	2.2
65 & over	55.8	46.7	41.1	13.3	12.4	10.8	9.9	8.8	8.5	2.4	3.9	3.6
TOTAL	19.2	17.6	18.0	7.0	7.2	8.5	5.5	5.3	7.1	1.7	2.0	2.9

**Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States 1974,
(Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Commerce,
Bureau of the Census, Table 88, p. 64).

FIGURE I

SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE RATES FOR THE U. S. FROM 1960 TO 1972***



¹Estimated. (Rates expressed per 100,000 Population).

***Source: Chart prepared by U. S. Bureau of the Census.

See Statistical Abstracts of the United States 1974,
(Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Commerce, p. 144).